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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to find some similiarities among different theories of moral development, presenting a literature review of research and a comparative analysis of results on three questions. The questions considered are: (1) What is the role of cognitive competence in moral development and what optimizes the cognitive aspects of moral growth? (2) What is the role of affect in moral development, and what optimizes the affective aspects of moral growth? (3) What supports the development of consistency between mature moral reasoning and moral behavior? It is suggested that the development of mature moral reasoning is facilitated by the imposition of real responsibilities in real social contexts, and by an environment which provides strong situational supports. (GO)

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WHAT OPTIMIZES MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOR? WHERE THE THEORIES CONVERGE[1]

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The question of my talk -- What optimizes moral development and behavior? -- calls to mind a dialogue in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland between Alice and the Cheshire Cat.

> "Would you tell me, please," says Alice to the cat, "which way I ought to go from here?"
>
> "That depends a great deal on where you want to get to," says the cat.
>
> "I don't much care where," says Alice.
>
> "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," says the cat.

What the Cheshire Cat knew, of course, is that there is a relationship between means and ends. You really can't say which way to go in optimizing moral development and behavior until you decide where you want to end up.

Deciding where you want to end up in moral development comes down to asking, What is moral development? What does it mean to develop morally? What is moral behavior?

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In years of defining and defending positions, much has been made of the differences in the way different theories of moral development answer these questions. My comments, by contrast, try to chart some emerging common ground among the theories that tends to be hidden by the dust of battle. Specifically, I would like to search out similarities around three major questions:

1. What is the role of cognitive competence in moral development, and what optimizes the cognitive aspects of moral growth?
2. What is the role of what could loosely be called affect in moral development, and what optimizes the affective aspects of moral growth?
3. What supports the development of consistency between mature moral reasoning and moral behavior? or, How do you get people to do what they know they ought to?

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[1]Presented as part of a symposium on "New Directions and Enduring Issues in the Study of Moral Development and Behavior" at The Conference of the Society for Research in Child Development, Denver, 1975.

I. What optimizes the cognitive aspects of moral growth?

Among current theories of moral development, there is solid agreement on at least one point: to develop morally is first to develop cognitively. Kohlberg (e.g., 1969, 1971) has argued for some time that Piaget's logical stages are prerequisites for corresponding moral stages. A child, for example, cannot socially go back and forth between two people's points of view and base his moral judgment on the principle of reciprocity until he can mentally go back and forth between the starting and end points of a physical change, as for example, when someone squashes a clay ball and asks him if it still has the same amount. Moral education, from a cognitive-developmental standpoint, should develop the individual's cognitive capacity for solving problems in the social-moral sphere, for weighing rights and obligations and resolving conflicts between values and people.

Martin Hoffman's (1976) theory of the development of altruism is from all appearances a cognitive-stage theory, one which emphasizes the close relationship between cognition and affect. Person permanence, role-taking, and a sense of personal identity form the essential cognitive foundation for altruistic motives. It is the individual's changing cognitive capacity that changes the nature of the sympathetic distress he feels for a victim.

From where the Mischels (1976) stand, maturing morally means learning to regulate your own behavior to achieve goals you have chosen, even when the goals are abstract or distant and even when the immediate external situation distracts or gets in the way. That kind of self-regulation involves not only setting your own goals but also considering alternative routes to them and the consequences of each, formulating rules to guide your choices, mentally transforming distracting situations into innocuous ones, and making plans for sequencing complex behavior patterns. That's a tall cognitive order.

The next question is, what stimulates the development of these cognitive bases of moral development that everyone agrees are so important? Cognitive-social learning theory, as the Mischels (1976) elaborate it, speaks of cognitive competencies which the person "constructs" or "generates" himself, but in the next breath suggests that competencies which change during development -- e.g., stages of moral reasoning -- do so because of changing models or expectancies in the social environment. You can't have it both ways. If the cognitive social-learning position is saying that cognitions are constructed by the child rather than "trained" in, then the role of social agents is to stimulate the self-development of structures -- and the difference between "cognitivized" social-learning theory and Piaget-style interactionism becomes difficult to discern. But if the Mischels', for example, believe that competencies come from indoctrination,

then stages can be trained in a variety of sequences, and a real difference between the theories in conception of moral development is clear. Just how a cognitive social learning approach would use external social influence to develop moral independence needs some spelling out.

Hoffman (1976) is more directly prescriptive, recommending role-taking opportunities for the child and chances to give help to others, along with corrective feedback when the child cannot figure out the available distress cues. When the child has injured someone, Hoffman suggests, parents should help him understand the thoughts and feelings of the victim. They can also make it clear that the desired behavior in any situation can be deduced from broad principles concerning human kindness and consideration.

Partly because Kohlberg's theory of moral development has been around longer, more studies are available on what stimulates moral development as he defines it. The best known cognitive-developmental recipe for stage change is a combination of internal conflict about how to resolve a moral dilemma and exposure to +1 reasoning, one stage above the subject's own dominant stage. Moshe Blatt (1969) pioneered in this dilemma discussion approach with small groups of junior high school students over a 12-week period, and got stage gains for most of the experimental subjects -- that were still observable one year later. Jim Rest (1974), in a careful analysis of several Kohlbergian moral education programs, suggests that a Blatt-type regimen of one verbal dilemma after another is a pretty dull academic diet, and speculates that Blatt's success may have been due to his clinical training in facilitating group interaction. Rest also questions whether it makes sense to urge teachers to give +1 responses to student's statements in discussion -- a task that would challenge a trained scorer. Further doubts about the effectiveness of the dilemma discussion approach come from some studies (e.g., Shaeffer, 1974) that used Blatt's methods, but failed to get any stage change.

But the data are mixed. Ann Colby's dissertation (1974), as described by Kohlberg, got stage change through peer discussion and also stimulated some development of stage 5 reasoning, without any exposure to stage 5 thinking.

Not long after Blatt's work, Guidance Associates Publishers (Pleasantville, New York) presented an opportunity for Kohlberg and Bob Selman to jazz up the dilemma approach through a series of dramatic moral dilemma sound film-strips, for children of elementary school age. I've used these myself to get discussions going in classrooms, as have many teachers in our program at Cortland. The filmstrips do a good job of bringing moral conflict down to the scale of the young child's world -- for example, should Holly climb a tree to rescue a stranded kitten for a small boy, or should she keep her newly made promise to her father not to climb any more trees?

Evidence that the filmstrips work comes from a recent study (1974) by Bob Selman and Marcus Lieberman. Second-graders from both blue-collar and middle-class districts in Cambridge saw the filmstrips in their classrooms twice a week for half a year. In small groups they discussed ways of resolving a dilemma, reasons for their choices, and whether some reasons are better than others -- with an adult teacher helping the whole process along. About 5 months after training, children in the experimental classes showed an average gain of about half a stage on one moral dimension that the study tested on -- namely, the child's ability to reflect on his own and others' intentions. And you don't need to be an expert to do this kind of moral education, Selman and Lieberman found. Lay teachers with no training in cognitive-developmental theory stimulated just as much growth as experienced teachers with training in the cognitive-developmental approach. The biggest gains occurred in the class of a lay teacher who showed the greatest enthusiasm about the project.

An excellent little book by Ed Sullivan called Moral Learning (1975), just published by Paulist Press, describes a series of creative variations on the moral discussion method. One particularly active approach uses a town meeting format to decide what to do in the face of a hypothetical moral event -- e.g., the principal whips 7 students in direct violation of school rules about punishment. Working with Canadian elementary and secondary schools through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Sullivan, Clive Beck, and their colleagues have come up with these interesting findings:

1. Gains from an educational program may take at least one year after the completion of the experiment to show up. Sullivan found this repeatedly, with both elementary and secondary students. He concludes that a moral education program may act as a catalyst, combining with subsequent social-moral experiences to bring about change.

2. The moral climate of a classroom and school appear to affect the outcome of a moral education curriculum. In one fairly open high school, with a teacher who was relatively unobtrusive during discussions, a course in ethics and moral development led to significant stage change. In a largely similar course in a less democratic school, with an authoritarian teacher who frequently interrupted students, there was no significant change.

Respect for the student as a person, Sullivan concludes, may be a critical underlying factor determining the effectiveness of other efforts to stimulate growth in moral thinking.

One new direction in developmental moral education is to de-emphasize dilemma discussion and concentrate on changing the social role of the person, coupled with reflection on the meaning of the new social experience. This is a combination of practicum and

seminar, which one study (Mosher and Sprinthall, 1970) showed worked better than either practicum or seminar alone. Ralph Mosher, Lois Erickson, and Norm Sprinthall have used this more "applied" approach to moral education in a number of ingenious ways with high school students. In one course on the "Psychology of Counseling" (Sprinthall & Erickson, 1974), for example, students learned counseling techniques and listening skills and used these with each other to discuss personally meaningful issues in their lives. In another course on the "Psychology of Growth for Women," female students learned interviewing skills and conducted field interviews of girls and women across the life span, and then discussed what their data showed about how women change through development in what they value and in how they view their roles. On both the Loevinger ego development scale (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970) and Kohlberg's moral development scale, students in this course showed significant movement from a conventional stage 3 orientation toward a more complex, system-oriented Stage 4, and even greater change on a follow-up test one year later.

In a similar vein, Patricia Grimes recently (1974) helped 11-year-old children move from Kohlberg's stage 2 to stage 3 through moral discussions that included their mothers. The practicum in this case turned out to be the home, where, the mothers reported, they spent a lot more time at the dinner table talking about moral issues raised by events on TV and in the newspapers.

The ink is just dry on a dissertation study by Paul Sullivan (1975) who stimulated a half-stage change in moral thinking in high school students and an advance of one full stage on Loevinger's ego development scale. The catalyst here was a year-long course with four segments: (1) moral discussions (using films); (2) training in counseling; (3) comparative moral philosophy and psychology; and (4) a two-part practicum experience which had the students lead moral discussions among 6th-graders and set up a high school Board of Appeals to handle discipline problems. It was the students' new social roles and their sense of having an impact on their social-moral environment, Sullivan feels, that contributed most to their substantial developmental change.

The new emphasis on moral education through real responsibilities in real social contexts can be seen as the practice catching up with the theory. The cognitive-developmental position (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969) has long been that role-taking opportunities, especially through active participation in social relationships and social institutions, are critical for the development of mature moral reasoning.

II . The Role of Affect in Moral Development

I'd like to turn now from reasoning and cognitive competence to what I am loosely calling "affect." What optimizes

its contribution to moral development?

A. Need Satisfaction as a Prerequisite for Moral Development

One idea which brings several theories together is the notion that psychological security or need satisfaction precedes moral maturity. Elizabeth Simpson (1976) has proposed the intriguing idea that Maslow's hierarchy of needs parallels Kohlberg's hierarchy of moral stages. She suggests that progress to a higher level of need, say, to need for self-esteem or self-actualization, is a prerequisite for progress to a higher moral stage, say, to a stage of principles and personal integrity.

Selman's clinical work (1976) with problem children leads him to conclude that affective egocentrism and low self-esteem are both cause and effect of retarded social-moral growth. Jim Gilligan (1976), speaking from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, argues that fear of shame or loss of face commonly blocks moral development, and to illustrate the point, cites cross-cultural accounts of tribes which are obsessed by fear of ridicule and vie with each other in committing atrocities. Hoffman (1976) reviews research showing a positive relation between altruistic behavior and emotional security, and concludes that need deprivation leads people to be preoccupied with themselves, whereas well-being leaves them open to the needs of others. Thus the old humanist idea has fresh support: you need to feel good about yourself to do right by others.

B. The role of optimal conflict or arousal in moral development

A second point where the theories converge in considering the role of affect in moral development is the idea that some form of optimal conflict, arousal, or disequilibrium facilitates growth. This is the idea that being moderately upset is good for you, although the theories differ in how they see its value. Social learning theory (e.g., Burton, 1976) talks about moderate levels of anxiety as optimally motivating states for learning new moral behaviors or performing old ones. Hoffman (1976) asserts that the child needs "the normal run of distress experiences" to develop sympathy and requires a certain amount of social conflict to allow him to learn that differences among people can be worked out.

Cognitive-developmental theories like Piaget's and Kohlberg's hold that disequilibrium is necessary to stimulate reorganization of thinking into higher stage forms. Elliot Turiel, in a recent issue of Child Development (1974), has a thoughtful essay presenting his findings on the nature of the transitional disequilibruim that people experience in moving from Stage 4 to Stage 5. He suggests that this particular period of uncertainty about what is moral arises from greater autonomy in adolescence and increasing exposure to a diversity of individual and cultural values. Extending this theme, Jim Garbarino and Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976) have elaborated a model

of moralization which says that sociocultural pluralism is a stimulus for growth at all developmental levels, as long as the conflict and diversity are affectively manageable. An environment which confronts the child with differing pulls of several social agents that compete for his affection and allegiance keeps him open to new social experience and eventually leads him to construct his own autonomous morality. Greater independence of moral judgment, Garbarino and Bronfenbrenner point out, is in fact correlated with pluralistic as opposed to monolithic social environments.

One person's optimal disequilibrium, of course, may be another person's excessive stress or confusion. In my own research on developing intentionality (Lickona, 1973), I exposed 1st and 2nd graders to two taped adults who contradicted each other and themselves as they debated which of two Piaget story characters was naughtier. About 40% of the children who heard this subsequently based their own judgments of responsibility on intentions, but a majority of the children became even more centered on objective consequences than they had been on the pretest.

* * *

I've saved the hardest answer for last.

III. What supports the development of consistency between moral thought and moral behavior?

The theories disagree about how much inconsistency exists between what people believe to be right and what they actually do, but all theories acknowledge that people don't always act according to their highest moral principles. The important question is, How do you maximize the correspondence? How do you help people behave at their highest level of moral awareness?

I'd like to identify three optimizing conditions that I think the different theories could agree on:

(1) Good models. Models in themselves do not lead directly to moral development, since developing morally is not the same thing as developing socially by imitating behaviors. But it seems to me that models can do at least two things to support moral development:

(a) They can teach the person the behaviors he needs to enter into a social experience that is a source of role-taking and moral development. Selman (Selman & Lieberman, 1974), for example, recommends that teachers actually show children how to debate a filmstrip dilemma; Sprinthall and Erickson (1974) used modeling processes to teach counseling and interviewing skills that opened up new realms of interaction and learning for their students. A second grade-teacher

in our program at Cortland (Manring, 1974) found she had trouble getting children to work together on cooperative learning projects until she demonstrated how they could make suggestions to each other instead of criticizing or giving orders.

(b) Secondly, the model you provide also tells the child what you really believe, or, as the old Indian said, what you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say. Sometimes kids will force you to be a good model, like it or not. When my 7-year-old was 4, he began issuing commands to his mother and me: "Mommy, get my dinner," "Daddy, read me a story," and so on. After not very much of that, we told him we didn't like getting orders, we like nice requests, etc. Well, the next day, during the morning hassle of getting him off to nursery school, I said, "Mark, get in the bathroom and brush your teeth and wash your face." He stopped, turned around and very seriously said, "Daddy, I don't like getting orders either."

I was properly humbled, and so we struck a bargain: no more orders on either side, and he's held me to it ever since (you can still do what Haim Ginott calls stating the situational requirements in a way that leaves the child's sense of autonomy intact by saying, e.g., "It's 8:00, Mark, and your teeth need brushing.")

The point here is that if you practice what you preach, you're more likely to get children to do the same, not just because they have a consistent model to emulate, but because the moral value -- reciprocity, fairness, respect for others -- comes through loud and clear.

(2) I think there's general agreement that consistency between moral thought and action is enhanced by helping people relate their behavior to their highest capacity for moral reflection. People don't seem to do this naturally. And I think it's easier, as Kohlberg and Turiel (1971) suggest, to encourage this kind of reflection when the individual has done something positive rather than something negative. Cognitive developmentalists, as well as behaviorists, need to catch the child being good. In a broad sense, this is what Sprinthall and Erickson did in having students reflect on the meaning of their new and satisfying social involvements as peer counselors or field students of female development.

(3) Finally, it's clear that a narrow focus on child-rearing or personal relationships is inadequate for conceptualizing what optimizes moral development. It's evident that the mature integration of thought and behavior in moral functioning needs the support of the situational or sociocultural context. This is the major conclusion of the New England prison intervention projects conducted by Kohlberg, Joe Hickey, Peter Scharf (1974) and others. Dilemma discussions didn't do the job. It was necessary to involve the prisoners in fashioning their own community, in making and enforcing rules, in group problem-solving -- all of this aimed at creating a moral atmosphere of

respect, fairness, and mutual support. This "just community" approach is also being tried by Kohlberg and his colleagues with some success in a number of Boston high schools.

Another illustration of the impact of the individual's social environment comes from Bob Selman's account (1976) of an extremely aggressive, egocentric 8-year-old who was at Stage 0 in his moral judgment. This boy was unresponsive to individual therapy, which was working against a bad home situation, but put in a summer camp where people consistently pointed out the reasons behind rules and actions, he advanced to a higher stage of understanding intentions and also won the friendship of his peers.

Along the same lines, Garbarino and Bronfenbrenner (1976) draw on a variety of historical examples to support their case that individual moral functioning is profoundly affected by the larger sociocultural context, and their theory that cultural pluralism, to be a positive influence on development, must exist within an integrated social structure where people have some stake in the common good. Huston and Korte (1976) describe laws that reward Good Samaritan behavior in emergency situations, and tell of communities that have worked together to forestall violent crime and aid victims in distress. This is still another example of how social conditions can be arranged to maximize the likelihood that people will translate compassion into conduct that helps another human being.

I think it's safe to say that in a home, or a school, or a society that consistently provides strong situational supports for the development of moral reasoning and moral behavior, many more people would develop the kind of principled, integrated moral system that no longer needs external support. I think all the theories would agree with the anonymous sage who said we need to create a world in which it is easier to be good. The problem thus far with broad-scale efforts to optimize moral development, to paraphrase Shaw, is not that they have been tried and found wanting, but that they have never been truly tried.

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